



## Facilitating Experiential Learning and Professional Skills Attainment in the Classroom: The Value of the Model United Nations Experience

### Background

**Deep learning:** Students’ ability to self-direct their’ own education, to adopt what is learned to a new situation, and to be lifelong learners (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001)

Four levels of knowledge necessary for deep learning:

- *Factual:* Learning the elements needed to solve a problem
- *Conceptual:* Understanding the relationships between ideas
- *Procedural:* Knowing how to do things
- *Metacognitive:* Being aware of one’s own learning

In-class simulations are considered to help students acquire and strengthen various **professional skills** such as *negotiation*, *public speaking*, *decision-making*, *research*, and *teamwork* (Asal, 2005; Baranowski and Weir, 2015). However, the SoTL in this field has either examined the pedagogical/disciplinary rationale for simulations or detailed the creation/application of simulations (Engel *et al.*, 2017). Our knowledge regarding the effects of international relations (IR) simulations on student learning is severely limited.

### Research Question

To what extent do in-class Model UN simulations facilitate students’ deep learning and professional skills attainment?

### Methodology

Poli 387: International Simulation (15-week Model UN course)

Enrollment: 35 students (F: 6%, Sop: 23%, J: 31%; Sen: 40%)

“Experiential learning” designation → 10 different majors

Online lectures: 11 weeks (on UN and theories of IR)

In-class sessions: 11 weeks (discussion and tutorials)

UN Simulation: 4 weeks (formal and informal proceedings)

3 committees (each with 12 countries and 3 topics)

Mixed-method Approach

*Quantitative Analyses* (Wilcoxon signed-rank tests)

- Pre- and post-simulation surveys (in January and May)
- Instructor’s assessment of student work (entire semester)

*Qualitative Analyses*

- Individual debriefing sessions (in May)

Example of *factual knowledge*:

“most efficient in helping me understand how IR operates” ... “I cannot wait to learn more”

Example of *conceptual knowledge*:

When debriefing, 34 students (97%) mentioned at least one IR theory when explaining the UN and 27 students (77%) used at least one appropriate example.

### Abstract

What is the role of Model United Nations (UN) in facilitating professional skills attainment in the classroom? Using a 15-week Model UN course with an enrollment of 35 students, I gather data on student progress in four levels of knowledge: *factual*, *conceptual*, *procedural*, and *metacognitive*. I use pre- and post-activity surveys with both closed- and open-ended questions designed to capture the students’ initial levels of knowledge and measure the progress they achieve throughout the semester. In addition, I conduct one-on-one interviews with each student to gather additional data on their progress. The findings suggest that Model UN has a substantially positive impact on students’ factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge as well as their self-perceived skills of *negotiation*, *decision-making*, *public speaking*, *research*, and *teamwork*. These results are also confirmed by the instructor’s evaluation of student progress. Importantly, the Model UN experience strengthens negotiation and public speaking more significantly than the other professional skills assessed.

### Summary of Findings (Levels of Knowledge)

Knowledge Assessed	Definition	Change based on students' self-assessment	Change based on instructor's assessment
Factual	How does the UN work in theory?	24%***	31%***
Conceptual	How to use IR theories to explain how the UN works?	<i>Not assessed</i>	34%***
Procedural	How to use UN rules of procedure properly?	13.7%***	28%***

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, and \*\*\* p < 0.001 (based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

### Summary of Findings (Professional Skills)

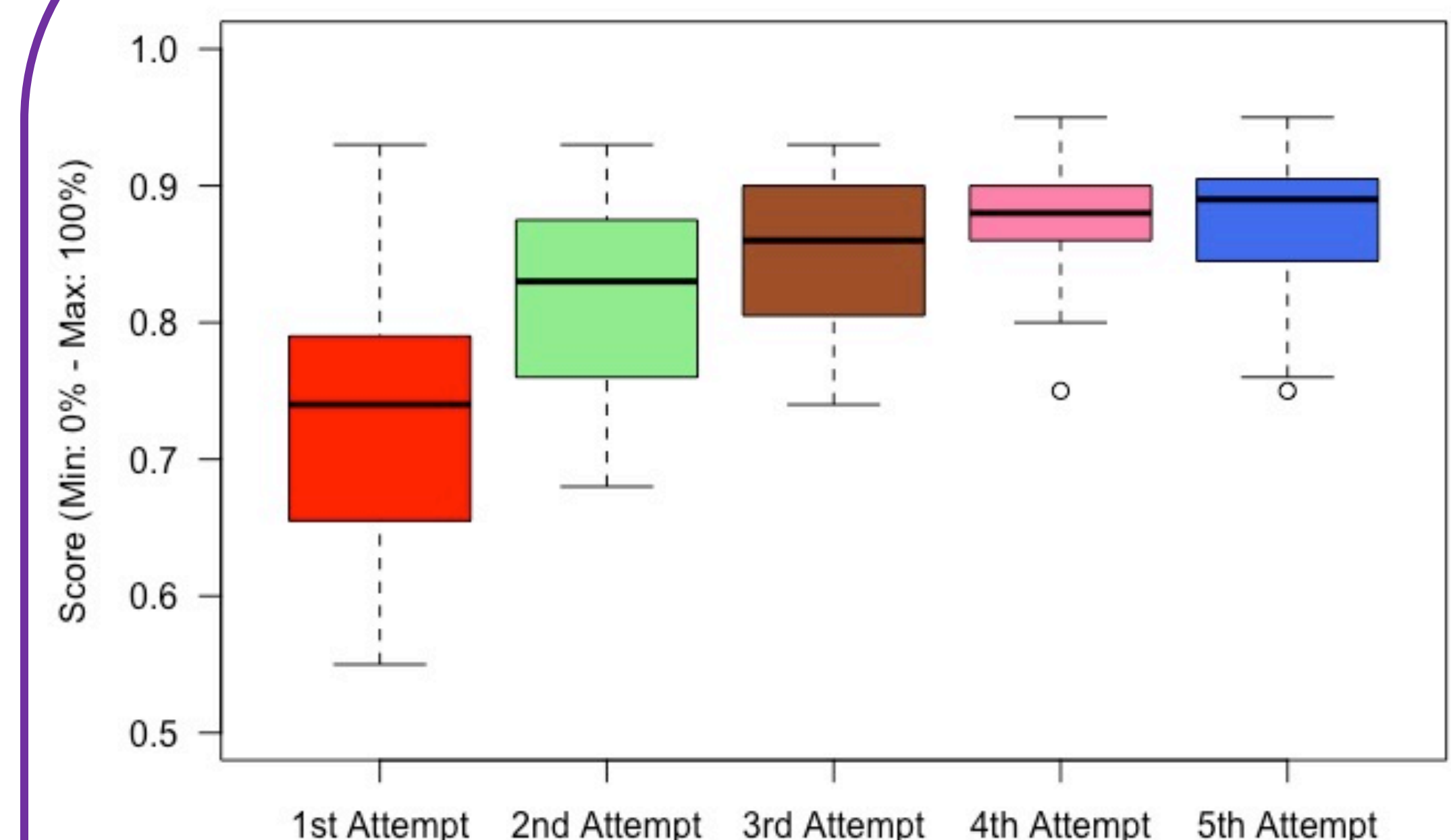
Professional Skill Assessed	Definition	Change based on students' self-assessment	Change based on instructor's assessment
Negotiation	Bargaining with peers, discovering a common ground, and reaching an agreement	13.7%***	28%***
Public speaking	Performing a formal, in-person speech in front of an audience	13.0%***	14%***
Decision-making	Choosing between two or more courses of action with available information	9.0%**	<i>Not assessed</i>
Research	Collecting systematic information to examine the validity of something	7.4%**	<i>Not assessed</i>
Teamwork	Collaborating with peers to achieve a common goal in the most efficient way	7.0%**	<i>Not assessed</i>

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, and \*\*\* p < 0.001 (based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

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### Public Speaking Skills (graded)



### Public Speaking Skills

Public Speeches Compared	Change in graded performance
1 <sup>st</sup> vs. 2 <sup>nd</sup>	8.2%***
2 <sup>nd</sup> vs. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.5%***
3 <sup>rd</sup> vs. 4 <sup>th</sup>	2.1%*
4 <sup>th</sup> vs. 5 <sup>th</sup>	-0.01%
1 <sup>st</sup> vs. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	11.6%***
1 <sup>st</sup> vs. 4 <sup>th</sup>	13.8%***
1 <sup>st</sup> vs. 5 <sup>th</sup>	13.5%***

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, and \*\*\* p < 0.001 (based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

### Implications

In-class Model UN has a substantial impact on:

#### I. Deep learning:

- 6-letter grade increase in **factual** knowledge
- 3.5-letter grade increase in **conceptual** knowledge
- 4-letter grade increase in **procedural** knowledge

#### II. Professional skills

- 4-letter grade increase in **negotiation** skills
- 3-letter grade increase in **public speaking** skills
  - 85% occurs during the initial three rounds

### References

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